

On March 21, 1918, the German armies debouched from their trench system known as the Hindenburg Line, and advanced continuously on one front or another until the first days of July, when they were halted by the Allies never to advance again. On July 18, 1918, Foch began the series of allied offensives that were to continue until Germany was beaten. All through July, August and September the Allies drove back the Germans on every front until on September 29th they found themselves back again behind the hitherto impregnable Hindenburg Line. The question now agitating the world was this: "Can Germany halt the Allies at the Hindenburg Line?" This question was answered in the negative on the British front. The men who answered it were the soldiers of the 30th Division.

On the night of September 23-24 the 30th Division took over what was known as the Nauroy sector, with a front of 3,700 yards. About 1,000 yards in front of them lay the main defenses of the Hindenburg Line. The Hindenburg Line at this point was a belt of fortified villages and trenches 7,000 to 10,000 yards in width, including the St. Quentin tunnel 6,000 yards in length, the mouth of which opened on the Nauroy sector. Beyond these defenses lay Nauroy, which the 30th Division was to take and hold until relieved. On September 27th, the Division succeeded in a preliminary effort to straighten out its lines. This put the 30th Division squarely on the start line for the attack to be launched simultaneously at 5:50 a. m., September 29th, by the 2nd American Corps and the 2nd and 3rd British Corps. Starting in perfect harmony with its artillery barrage, therefore, the 30th Division attacked the Hindenburg Line with the 60th Brigade leading and elements of the 59th Brigade in support.

By the afternoon of the 29th, the 30th Division pierced the Hindenburg Line, stormed Bellicourt, and took Nauroy. Beyond it lay the open country filled with retreating Germans, and here it was relieved by the Australians. In this fight the 30th Division carried out exactly its plans, co-operating exactly with the Divisions on its right and left, and breaking the Hindenburg Line first of all the Divisions engaged in the fight.

General Faison thus stated the importance of this fight in his battle order to the 60th Brigade:

"It is deemed a special honor that our Corps should have been selected to break through the Hindenburg Line at this point, which, if successful, should almost certainly lead to decisive results. Upon our success depends the entire movement of the Australian Division, which has been designated to exploit and carry forward our lines. It is a point both of duty and honor that all should succeed, and this Brigade is called upon to push through at all costs. The Brigade Commander feels and knows that he is not calling upon the Brigade in vain."

After the break through, General Lewis, the Division Commander, comments as follows:

"To be given the task, in its initial effort (this was the first divisional action) to play an important role in breaking through the Hindenburg Line, the strongest defense on the Western Front, was a great honor, and the fact that the breakthrough was actually made on the Divisional front is ample evidence that the honor was not misplaced."

The 30th Division ranks among the first divisions of our army in personnel, length of service, losses sustained, distance advanced against the enemy, and prisoners captured. Of the 78 Congressional Medals of Honor won by the whole American Expeditionary Forces, 12 went to individuals of the 30th Division, more than to any other division. But the proudest distinction of the Old Hickory Division is that on September 29, 1918, it broke through the Hindenburg Line first of all the Divisions in the Allied offensive.